

# **Fiona Murphy ~ Remember Baghdad. Arabic Version. With Introduction From Edwin Shuker**

Five families from the Jewish community look back on a scarcely imaginable time in Baghdad - Iraq was booming, it was pleasure-seeking, and there was inter-communal trust. Iraq was once one of the most diverse places on earth, more tolerant of its minorities than any European nation.

Today, after decades of war and instability, Iraq is a very different place. In spite of the danger, North Londoner Edwin Shuker decides to return to the country he loved. We follow him back to Baghdad. He wants to buy a house in Iraq so that he can say "the Jews have not all gone". He wants to plant a seed of hope for the future.

Website: <https://rememberbaghdad.com/>

*From the Director's Statement:*

'The lives of my parents' families closed down as the British Empire shattered: my father's community was thrown out of Ireland and my mother's fled Jamaica. I grew up in London, conscious that people suffer for the crimes of generations long gone.

So when I was between films and was offered a job cataloguing an extraordinary archive of early home movies belonging to an Iraqi-Jewish family, I responded vividly to the news that the Jews of Iraq did well under the British, and paid for it. They had committed no crimes, and unlike mine, nor had their community.

The end of the British Empire was not the only strand that bound their stories together with mine. My mother's family was ethnically Jewish. And while that was where the historical similarities ended, the smiling faces in the archive and the stark fact that only five Jews remain in Iraq today, awakened my own sense of loss.

At first I just wanted to convey the pain of losing your home. It seemed important,

now, right now, to push back at the narrowness of our news, dominated by discussion of economic migrants, desperate refugees and the difficulties of integrating immigrants. The older stories were laments about the pain of exile: “It’s a Long Long Way to Tipperary”, and “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept”. I wanted to show that that migrants travel with heavy hearts, give them a voice, and bring back the world that was lost. I knew this must be my next film.’

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## **Eva Ludemann ~ Arabier & Seculier. De opmars van afvallige moslims in de Arabische wereld**



*Eva Ludemann. Portret:  
Joseph Sassoon Semah*

Historicus en journalist Eva Ludemann heeft een boek geschreven over de afvallige moslim in de Arabische wereld. Zij onderzocht in welke mate jonge

mensen in de Arabische wereld gebroken hebben met de islam en of de extremistische bewegingen invloed hebben gehad op hun besluit de islam te verlaten. Uit het jaarlijks gehouden onderzoek van 'Arab Youth Survey' uit 2019 vindt 66% dat religieuze instituten moeten worden hervormd omdat ze een te grote invloed hebben. De helft van de jongeren vindt dat religie de ontwikkeling van de Arabische wereld belemmert en dat religie tegelijkertijd aan invloed verliest in de regio.

Ludemann stelt de vraag hoe is het om ex-moslim te zijn in de Arabische wereld, je los te wortelen van het systeem dat is doortrokken van geloof.

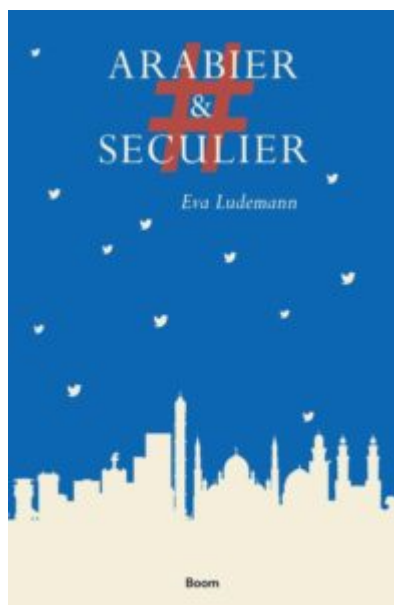
Sinds de Arabische Lente en vooral ook als reactie op het fundamentalistische geweld van groeperingen als ISIS, stelt een groeiende groep jongeren op sociale media vragen over de islam. Zolang ze niet online gaan, zijn ze aangewezen op verouderde, starre, religieuze teksten. Ze willen zelf kunnen bepalen waarin ze wel en niet geloven en hoe ze hun geloof belijden. Voor Arabische jongeren is internet wat de boekdrukkunst ooit was voor de christelijke wereld: ze hebben toegang gekregen tot informatie die tot voor kort niet beschikbaar was. Op sociale media debatteren ze over nieuwe grondwetten en pluriformiteit. Openlijk durft echter niemand te zeggen dat ze ex-moslim zijn. En degenen die wel openlijk hun geloof hebben afgelegd zijn gevlucht naar Europa, de VS of Canada. Maar de Arabische regimes zijn als de dood voor hun opmars en daarom hebben ze blasfemie en afvalligheid in veel gevallen voor de wet gelijkgesteld aan terrorisme. Maar de geest is uit de fles. Zoals wij in het Westen zijn ontkerkelijk, zo zijn ook steeds meer Arabische jongeren langzaam maar zeker aan het 'ontmoskeeën'- met dank aan internet, aldus Ludemann.

Ludemann interviewt voor haar onderzoek jongeren, live of via internet. Ismael en zijn vrouw Joumana ontmoet ze in Hurghada waar ze naar zijn gevlucht. Zij hebben geleidelijk hun religie afgelegd. Hij is een van de weinige Arabieren die openlijk pleit voor een scheiding tussen religie en politiek. Deze scheiding heeft in islamitische landen nooit plaatsgevonden; de Arabische wereld heeft ook geen Verlichting zoals die in het Westen gekend. Hij komt uit Alexandrië en heeft een You Tube-show met zo'n 30.000 volgers, waarin hij discussieert over pluriformiteit en een seculiere grondwet. Zijn twijfels over de islam kwam (zoals ook bij vele andere ex-moslimes) vooral door de evolutietheorie, waar geen aandacht aan mocht worden besteed op school, maar waar hij kennis van nam via internet. Het was geen gemakkelijk proces in een wereld met een

fundamentalistische islam, waarin de Koran als letterlijk woord van God de regel is, de norm is geloven. Wie daaraan niet voldoet, is afvallig, ontaard, met alle consequenties van dien. Joumana was al uitgehuwelijkt maar onder invloed van de revolutie, haar bezoeken aan het plein bij de al-Qaed Moskee, en de val van Mubarak begon ze vragen te stellen over religie die niet meer te stoppen waren. 'Wij vrouwen', zo legt Jouama uit, 'zijn vaak de dupe van de islam. Mannen leggen ons op wat hen uitkomt en zeggen dan: 'dat moet van Allah'.

Ze had via Ismaels You Tube kanaal kennis gemaakt met zijn ideeën over een seculiere constitutie. Via Facebook had ze contact met hem gezocht en nu leven ze samen in het kleine toeristenstadje aan de Egyptische Rode Zee.

Ludemann spreekt ook andere jonge mensen, zoals Waleed al-Husseini, een Palestijn van de Westelijke Jordaanoever, die tien maanden in de gevangenis zat omdat hij zijn gedachten over religie online had gezet. Dat was voor hem de druppel, hij werd ex-moslim. Hij schreef in 2015 *'Blasfemateur! Les prisons d'Allah'*. Hij woont nu in Parijs waar hij met andere ex-moslims de *'Conseil des Ex-Musulmans de France'* oprichtte. In 2017 schreef hij zijn tweede boek *'Une trahison française: Les collaborationnistes de l'islam radical dévoilés'*, waarin hij in zijn ogen zwakke manier waarop de Franse staat omgaat met de islamitische terroristen bekritiseert. Voor hem bestaat geen gematigde moslim. Er zijn meerdere sites voor ex-moslims, de Golfstaten laten het op Facebook afweten, maar elders communiceren besloten groepen met elkaar in het Arabisch.



Mohammed uit Jordanië is van jihadi tot ongelovige geworden, vertelt hij via Skype aan Ludemann.

'Als je opgroeit in een islamitische omgeving, wordt je kritische geest ontmoedigd, gestraft. Islamitische kinderen moeten luisteren, geen vragen stellen, ze moeten doen wat hen wordt gezegd. En ze horen vrijwel dagelijks dat ze moeten willen leven zoals de Profeet en dat alle kaffers dood moeten, dat alle joden dood moeten. Dat is zeer gevaarlijk en giftig. Het is dan maar een kleine stap naar gewelddadig radicalisme.' Via de universiteit kwam hij in aanraking met de salafistische islam en de kalifaatsgedachte. In

zijn zoektocht naar de ultieme waarheid, kreeg hij echter steeds meer vragen. Hij moest van zichzelf bewijzen dat Allah bestaat. Hij stuitte op Youtube op een

filmpje van Richard Dawkins over de evolutie en zijn geloof stortte als een kaartenhuis in. Hij praat met Ludemann om openlijk te kunnen zeggen waar ze wel en niet in willen geloven. Want wie durft als moslim te zeggen dat hij liever niet in een islamitische maatschappij woont?

Het is niet te achterhalen hoeveel ex-moslams er zijn in het Midden-Oosten en Noord-Afrika: zo staat bv in een statistiek van het leidend overheidsinstituut voor islamitisch recht, het Dar al-Ifta, dat er in Egypte 866 atheïsten zijn; en in totaal in de Arabische wereld en Noord-Afrika 2223 niet-gelovigen, op een bevolking van driehonderd miljoen mensen. In een ander, zeldzaam onderzoek naar afvalligheid in de Arabische wereld de *Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism* uit 2012, uitgevoerd door het Amerikaanse marktonderzoeksbureau Win Gallup International wordt gesteld dat een vijfde van de moslams in de onderzochte landen zichzelf 'niet religieus' noemt.

Eva Ludemann constateert dat de toekomst van de Arabische wereld niet echt hoopvol is: op vele vlakken is ze gestagneerd: sociaal, politiek, economisch, technologisch en intellectueel. Maar aan de andere kant: voor de Arabische revolutie bestonden er geen Facebookvriendengroepen voor ex-moslams in het Midden-Oosten en Noord-Afrika. Ex-moslams bestaan nu. We moeten wat geduldiger zijn, de Verlichting was immers ook niet in een jaartje geklaard. Ze sluit af met 'het gaat met kleine mini-stapjes, maar the genie is out of the bottle'.

*Eva Ludemann - Arabier & seculier. De opmars van afvallige moslams in de Arabische wereld.* Boom uitgevers, Amsterdam, 2019. ISBN 9789024430253

*Linda Bouws - St. Metropool Internationale Kunstprojecten*

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**Edwin Shuker ~ “We Dreamt Of Being Expelled.” Being Jewish In**

# Iraq

Growing up Jewish in Baghdad Edwin Shuker remembers one thing very clearly: the desire to run away and lead a normal life with his family. The road to London was far from easy...

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## **Joseph Sassoon Semah, Henk Wijnen en Renée Hartog over de rol van de kunstenaar, vrijheid en engagement**

In het kader van On Friendship/(Collateral Damage) III - The Third GaLUT; Baghdad, Jerusalem, Amsterdam was op 25 november 2019 vanuit Werkgebouw het Veem Amsterdam: Een gesprek tussen Joseph Sassoon Semah en Henk Wijnen over de rol van de kunstenaar, vrijheid en engagement, onder leiding van Renée Hartog, cultureel diplomaat.

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## **We Are Facing Economic Collapse On Top Of A Pandemic. What We**

# Do Now Matters.



*Prof.dr. Robert Pollin*

As the COVID-19 virus spreads, the U.S. economy has begun to crumble like a house of cards.

The sudden collapse of the economy is revealing how the “great economy” that Donald Trump has been boasting about on Twitter for the past three years was in fact a mirage caused by wild Wall Street rallies, and boosted by Trump’s massive tax cuts and deregulatory efforts contrast which rolled back all kinds of environmental standards with total disregard for the impact on public health and the climate crisis.

As the shutdowns orchestrated to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus create financial ruin for individuals and businesses across the country, the economy is “teetering on collapse,” points out Robert Pollin, distinguished professor of economics and co-director of the Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in this exclusive interview for *Truthout*.

But Pollin also argues that — with the right decisions — we have the means not only to rescue the complete collapse of the economy, but also to move in the direction of a just, equitable and sustainable socioeconomic order. The following transcript has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

*C.J. Polychroniou: Can you give a succinct summary of the myths and realities of Trump’s economy from the day he took office and up until the outbreak of COVID-19?*

*Robert Pollin:* Throughout his presidency, until basically last week, Trump’s mantra on the economy is that conditions have never, ever been better. This was

always a ludicrous assertion. But as distinct from many other of Trump's assertions, this one was based on at least some slivers of evidence, with the two critical slivers being the stock market and the unemployment rate. It is true, first of all that, as of last July, the U.S. stock market had reached an historic high, with the S&P 500 index exceeding 3,000 for the first time. It is also true that the official unemployment rate had hit a record low of 3.5 percent as of February. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the last time the official U.S. unemployment rate was below 3.5 percent was 1953.

But the stock market rise reflected, more than anything, a combination of (1) companies deliberately inflating their own stock prices through buying back their shares on the open market; and (2) the reinforcement, with Trump, of the upward distribution of income and wealth that has proceeded now for 40 years under neoliberalism. For example, with Trump's signature across-the-board tax cuts in 2017, the benefits for the poorest 20 percent of the population amounted to an average of \$100 while the richest 1 percent received \$55,000. Over the next decade, the poorest 20 percent would then see their taxes go up while the richest 1 percent would benefit from further cuts.

With the historically low official unemployment rate, if we add up the people who were working part-time but wanted full-time jobs as well as those who have temporarily given up looking for work, plus we account for the share of people who have dropped out of the labor force following the 2007-09 Great Recession, we are now at a more realistic unemployment rate of nearly 10 percent. This is about 16 million people, roughly equal to the entire populations of New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago. On top of this, wages had only begun to start inching up with the unemployment rate at its historically low level. This is after 40 years of most working people experiencing falling or stagnating real wages.

In short, our current economy was never anything close to the halcyon image projected by Trump until this week. In any case, all of those rosy descriptions are now a thing of the past.

*How has the novel coronavirus affected the U.S. economy? Do you think there are both short-term and long-term impacts?*

The coronavirus is devastating the U.S. economy as I write. I am certainly not focused here on the stock market having fallen by roughly 20 percent since its



peak on February 14. More to the point: If we add up current employment in the hospitality and leisure industries — including restaurants, bars and hotels — plus retail trade, plus transportation, we are talking about 38 million jobs. That is roughly 25 percent of all employment in the U.S. economy. Now let's assume, conservatively, that half of these people are facing layoffs or at least extended furloughs. That's close to 20 million people. Unless the government does something dramatic, this, by itself, could easily raise the official unemployment rate above 10 percent in a matter of weeks, i.e. to a point higher than the worst phase of the Great Recession. The effective percentage of people experiencing serious employment stresses — i.e. lost paychecks from furloughs or reductions in hours — could easily be at least double that figure, i.e. 20 percent or above. These back-of-the-envelope calculations do not even take account of the fact that government tax revenues are plunging with people losing income and cutting back on spending. As governments lose tax revenues, how are they then going to find the funds to pay teachers, firefighters, police officers and even health care workers?

All of these are not merely “short-term” events. They are immediate effects, happening right now, at a breakneck pace. There will also be deep longer-term effects. But what exactly these will be will depend on how we intervene politically now in handling the crisis. For example, the Federal Reserve has already announced that it is prepared to bail out Wall Street yet again, under the same type of interventions that they conducted during the 2007-09 crisis. But maybe this time we can successfully make a case that at least a significant share of the financial markets need to be nationalized, not just bailed out. A wholesale financial market bailout means that Wall Street continues to operate under a perverted variant of socialism that has emerged under neoliberalism — i.e., Wall Street's risks are borne by society as a whole while their profits remain all for themselves.

*The stock market rallied big time last week after Trump's announcement of a national emergency on account of COVID-19. But then the market plunged again last Monday, experiencing its worst day since the 1987 crash. How significant are such stock market swings from a macroeconomic standpoint?*

Whatever happens with the stock market does not, by itself, cause the economy to perform better or worse. The fact is, as I noted above, the stratospheric level that the stock market had reached before the coronavirus took hold resulted from both

market manipulations by corporations buying back their own shares, plus the upward redistribution of income. So an orderly, long-term decline in the stock market would be a good thing if it meant a reduction in market manipulation and a reversal of the long-term rise of inequality. But the market volatility that is occurring now is reflecting the expectation that the real economy — which includes people's incomes, jobs, pensions and health care coverage, not just stock prices — is teetering on collapse. If, for example, the official unemployment rate were to rise to 10 percent or above, there is no amount of fancy stock-buyback schemes, or further tax cuts for the rich, that can compensate for an overall decline in economic activity of this magnitude. An economy with an official unemployment rate of 10 percent will produce huge falls in real productive investments in the economy by private businesses — i.e., people opening new businesses or purchasing equipment and hiring people to expand their existing business operations. When this happens, stock market prices will continue falling, as one indicator of what is happening in the real economy.

*Given that we are clearly in the midst of a public health and economic crisis alike, what realistic measures are there available to policymakers in order not simply to stave off an economic collapse, but also to put the U.S. economy on a truly sustainable and equitable track?*

Step one must entail doing everything possible to deal with the public health emergency. That means, effectively, that Medicare for All must be put into operation right away, at least until the crisis conditions have lifted. That is, everyone needs to be able to get tested and treated for the novel coronavirus, without facing any kinds of financial concerns whatsoever. That is the only way in which the spread of the virus has a chance of being controlled. Once the crisis has past, it should then have become obvious that Medicare for All needs to be in place all the time. We will have to make that case forcefully after the crisis conditions lift.

Concurrent with ensuring that people get the treatment they need, we must expand our capacity to treat people dramatically and right away. This means creating temporary hospital facilities as needed, for example, in the college dormitories and hotels that are empty now anyway. It means expanding health care staffing by creating jobs for health care workers at all levels who have been unemployed or underemployed, as well as bringing retired health care workers back into the labor force. This won't happen unless these workers — along with all

other health care workers — are offered good pay to take on the enormous challenges they will face.

We then have to make sure that people experiencing income losses have money in their pockets. All workers first, therefore, need to be certain that they will be receiving paid sick leave. Right now, 24 percent of all workers do not have paid sick leave coverage. But this benefit is skewed toward higher-paid workers. Roughly 70 percent of the lowest-paid workers (those in the bottom 10 percent in terms of income) [do not have paid sick leave](#) benefits. Yet these workers, are the ones who will be most badly hurt by the coming job losses and furloughs.

Beyond extending paid sick leave to everyone, the federal government needs to send out checks to everyone, just as George W. Bush did in 2001, after the Wall Street crash that year (which occurred before 9/11). The Bush program included \$300-\$600 checks for two-thirds of U.S. families. Something in the range of double those amounts — something like \$1,500 to \$2,000 per family is warranted now, for starters. More is likely to be needed depending on the course of the crisis.

Directly supporting people with money is a far more effective intervention now than the payroll tax cuts being advanced by Trump. For one thing, the payroll tax cuts will dribble out slowly, when we are facing a collapse of people's incomes through mass furloughs and layoffs that are immediate. With the payroll tax cuts, higher-income people will, again, get more money coming back to them, when what we need are benefits flowing disproportionately to lower-income people, who are facing the most severe income losses. The payroll tax cuts will also not help at all people who are unemployed. We therefore also need to greatly expand unemployment benefits across the board. Businesses should be given tax credits to match their extension of paid sick leave to their workers. They should also receive some form of tax cut or credit to help keep them afloat during the crisis. But using the payroll tax cut as the stimulus tool is dangerous in any case, since payroll taxes are the way we finance Social Security.

All of these measures will, of course, require lots of money, right away. This is at a moment when the federal government's fiscal deficit, at 4.6 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), is at a historic high for an economic expansion period as opposed to a recession. Our big federal deficit today is the direct result of the Trump tax cuts for the rich. But we cannot worry right now about how much the deficit increases, at least as a first-order problem. In 1943, in the middle of World

War II, the federal deficit rose to nearly 27 percent of GDP. We still have a long way to go to hit that level.

Moreover, if the federal deficit were to rise to anything close to that level, the Federal Reserve can simply buy up the excess supply of U.S. government bonds, what is called “debt monetization” in technical parlance. This enables the government to effectively print money to finance the government interventions necessary to effectively counteract the crisis. I do not favor this approach to government financing under most circumstances, unlike some other progressive economists. But right now, we need to use all available policy tools to the extent necessary to stave off an economic collapse on top of the health care pandemic.

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*C.J. Polychroniou* is a political economist/political scientist who has taught and worked in universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. His main research interests are in European economic integration, globalization, the political economy of the United States and the deconstruction of neoliberalism’s politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout*’s Public Intellectual Project. He has published several books and his articles have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into several foreign languages, including Croatian, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Turkish. He is the author of [\*Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change\*](#), an anthology of interviews with Chomsky originally published at *Truthout* and collected by Haymarket Books.

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## **World Jewish Congress - “We disappeared.” The story Of Jewish**

# Refugees From The Middle East And North Africa

The stories of the people who witnessed the end of Jewish life in their countries of origin, from Iraq to Libya, and were forced to start from scratch: the Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Jewish presence in Arab countries long predates Islam and the Arab conquest of the Middle East and goes back to Biblical times. According to official statistics, over 850,000 Jews were forced to leave their homes in Arab countries between 1948 and the early 1970s. Today, there are fewer than 7,000 Jews left.

Watch the testimonies here: <http://ow.ly/EdeIN>